

The search for stability and simplicity – Part 1

Centre for Brexit Studies Academics have contributed to another Bite-Size Brexit book which aims to put an industry which has been somewhat forgotten in the Brexit debate into the frame: Agriculture.

Farmageddon? Brexit and British Agriculture, edited by Caroline Stocks and John Mair, explores both paths that Brexit could mean for Agriculture in the UK. Being an underexplored issue in the ‘Great Brexit Debate’, the book remedies that and puts the industry, which will impact a huge amount of businesses across Britain, into the spotlight.

Brexit could offer an opportunity for British Agriculture post Brexit, free of the Common Agricultural Policy. It could also be a disaster with export markets lost, subsidies and bankruptcies. But which one will it be?

We are delighted to share Fergus Ewing’s chapter in the book on the blog today, enjoy...

The search for stability and simplicity

Fergus Ewing is SNP MSP for Inverness and Nairn, a seat he has held since 1999. During his time as an MSP he has sat on various committees, including finance and transport, and has acted as Minister for Community Safety and Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism. In 2016 he was appointed as the Scottish Government’s Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy.

Scotland’s rural communities and farm businesses are critically dependent on support from the European Union, so much so that the country would rather walk away from the United Kingdom than give up its EU membership. Scottish Rural Economy Secretary Fergus Ewing explains why Scottish agriculture isn’t prepared to deal with the complications of Brexit.

With a mother renowned across Europe as ‘Madame Ecosse’, it’s no surprise that I developed an understanding and appreciation of what EU membership provides for Scotland – probably much more than is healthy for the average 20-something.

My mother, Winnie Ewing, was an MEP for the Highlands and Islands of Scotland for 20 years from 1979 to 1999. During that time, she forged a redoubtable reputation as a feisty advocate for those regions’ — and also Scotland’s — interests.

Just as she left her mark on Europe, so Europe has left its mark on many of Scotland’s rural communities. Everywhere you go in our rural areas, you can see the positive evidence of our membership: the farming sector supported by more than £300m annually, the fishing vessels and harbours, which benefit from more than £100m of investment, the trees being planted in our national forests to help mitigate climate change, the £20m being used to fund rural businesses and community facilities.

All over rural Scotland, there are bridges, roads, sports centres, swimming pools, museums, art galleries, theatres, colleges, factories and enterprise parks, which have been brought into existence with support through our EU membership.

As the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy, I now find myself in the unenviable position of trying to prevent the dismantling of that legacy, and to defend and protect rural Scotland’s interests from the worst that Brexit might result in. It is not proving easy.

Working to ensure EU membership remains a reality

There are clearly pockets of rural Scotland where the vote to leave the EU was higher than in Scotland as a whole, and we need to understand why that is and to try and change that. But on any measure, rural Scotland’s interests are better served by remaining in the EU than leaving.

That reason, and the fact that Scotland voted to remain in the EU, is why the Scottish Government is working to try and make that a reality — for all of the UK.

We published not one, but two assessments of the Brexit options to help add our views and analysis to the UK Government's considerations of what sort of deal to negotiate with the EU to leave³. Both were ignored.

We have engaged at ministerial and official level since summer 2016 to explore key issues and try and achieve common ground.

Given the potential impact of Brexit on rural policy, practice, law, and funding, Scottish Government officials in key rural areas like farming, fishing, animal health and welfare, plant health and disease, and food and drink have spent very little time doing anything else.

The fact that we have still been able to keep delivering a domestic agenda in the last two years – the full devolution of forestry, establishing a South of Scotland enterprise agency, providing grants and land opportunities to nearly a thousand new and young entrants in farming, supporting our food and drink sector to record turnover levels in 2017 – is testament to the dedication, professionalism and expertise of civil servants in the Scottish Government and our agencies.

And while engagement with the UK Government, and especially with the other devolved administrations, has been respectful and courteous, it has not resulted in much.

[Read Part 2 of this chapter here.](#)

Farmageddon? Is now available on Amazon. [Find out more here.](#)